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Intestinal caeca in the South African Columbidae

by MILES B. MARKUS

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Intestinal caeca are to be found in some columbid species but are absent in many others. The specific variation shown by the Columbidae with regard to the presence or absence of these diverticula would appear to be of special interest in view of the fact that the majority of avian families do not exhibit the same inconstancy.

If the Green Pigeon *Treron calva* (Temminck & Knip) is placed in a family distinct from the Columbidae, 12 South African species (6 genera) belonging to the latter category are currently recognised. A number of specimens of each of the following species have been dissected: Rock Pigeon *Columba guinea* Linnaeus, Cape Turtle Dove *Streptopelia capicola* (Sundevall), Laughing Dove *Streptopelia senegalensis* (Linnaeus), Namaqua Dove *Oena capensis* (Linnaeus) and Emerald-spotted Wood Dove *Turtur chalcospilos* (Wagler). Intestinal caeca are absent in *O. capensis* and *T. chalcospilos* but are present in *C. guinea*, *S. capicola* and *S. senegalensis*. They are also present in the Red-eyed Turtle Dove *Streptopelia semitorquata* (Rüppell) (Verheyen, 1957: 9).

Existing information for certain other South African representatives does not appear to be altogether satisfactory and data on those not listed above are either inadequate or lacking and should, where possible, be based on the examination of more than one bird, in view of the fact that the presence in this family of a single intestinal diverticulum as an intraspecific variation is not unknown (Beddard, 1898: 308; Mitchell, 1901: 239). There is reasonable evidence that caeca are absent in the Blue-spotted Wood Dove *Turtur afer* (Linnaeus) but confirmation would be useful. In the case of the Rameron Pigeon *Columba arquatrix* Temminck & Knip, careful examination of the wall of the gut in the area of junction between the ileum and rectum should be made, if possible, in the case of fresh specimens rather than those which have been placed in a preservative.

One hesitates to say whether or not the caeca are of any systematic importance as taxonomic value cannot be assessed independently of adaptive significance. Whatever their function may have been in the past, the present role of the vestigial intestinal caeca in the Columbidae is probably nothing more than lymphatic.

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On the races of the Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus* wintering in south-eastern Africa

by P. A. CLANCEY

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Rudebeck (1963) has recently endeavoured to review our present knowledge of the races of the Holarctic Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus* (Linnaeus) occurring during the period of the northern winter in Africa south of the Cunene and Zambesi Rivers, from which general area two forms are currently admitted, viz., *N. p. phaeopus* (Linnaeus), 1758: Sweden, usually considered to be of general disposition, and *N. p. alboaxillaris* Lowe, 1921: Inhambane district, Moçambique, believed known from within present limits only on the basis of the original material taken in Portuguese East Africa. Unfortunately, Rudebeck worked on notes taken from skins in the Transvaal Museum collection many years prior to the preparation of his note, and did not have later access to the material, all of which was collected over half a century ago.

The series of Whimbrels in the Durban Museum collection is comparatively fresh, several having been taken within recent years, and study of this assemblage throws much light on the question of the races occurring in South Africa, showing that three races occur within South African limits in the east.

Apart from several examples of the nominate race taken in Durban Bay, Natal, in the months of December, March and April, two specimens of the much disputed *N. p. alboaxillaris*, a ♂ and ♀ taken on 27th December, 1961, are included in our series. Originally believed to have its breeding grounds on the south-east African coast and the Mascarene Islands, *N. p. alboaxillaris* is now known to nest on the steppes lying between the lower reaches of the Volga and Ural Rivers, to the north of the Caspian in Kazakhstan, U.S.S.R. (see Dementiev and Gladkov (1960)).

N. p. alboaxillaris is slightly paler on the upper parts and wings than *N. p. phaeopus*, the scapulars and tertials rather more edged with whitish, and the rump and upper tail-coverts are white, only the longest of the last named with reduced transverse barring. On the under parts whiter than the nominate race, the ventral streaking more restricted to the lower throat and upper breast, the lateral surfaces approaching plain white, while the axillaries and under wing-coverts are white without the transverse sepia barring of other races, the dark areas reduced to fine mesial streaks. The two specimens from Natal represent the first records of the race concerned for the Republic of South Africa, and are the most southerly examples of the race yet taken. The finding of these skins in our collection confirms Rudebeck's prediction that this form would be found to the south of Moçambique.

In addition to the specimens allocated to *N. p. phaeopus* and *N. p. alboaxillaris*, a specimen showing the diagnostic characters of a third race requires to be considered. A male in its first year taken on 12th October, 1961, in Durban Bay has the white surface of the back and rump densely